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Territories of Innovation: The local dimension of innovative inclusive education practices

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Project EDUPLACES

Main research questions:

1. From the implicated actors' point of view, which processes and factors, subjects, rationales and (institutional, local, community) partnerships contribute to building inclusive socio-educational practices?
2. Which (social, institutional, biographical) processes and factors support the interruption of the negative spiral of school failure and school dropout/early leaving, and favour the remobilization of young people towards learning and building successful academic pathways?



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- Available research draws attention to **multidimensional factors and causes behind the processes of school failure and dropout**, and to multiple policies, programmes and practices aimed at overcoming such processes.
- However, not much is known about **the points of view of implicated actors**; the construction of successful academic pathways by young people experiencing **remobilization** in the framework of inclusive socio-educational practices.



Project EDUPLACES

- Multicase study
- Eleven units of observation
- Four Portuguese municipalities
- Three phases/years
- Team of fifteen researchers (UMinho, UPorto, UTAD and UAlgarve)
- Major milestones:
 - 1: Panel of Inclusive Practices
 - 2: Inclusive Practices' Portfolio
 - 3: Inclusive Practices' Monographs
 - 4: Profiles of Atypical Academic Pathways



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OBJECTIVES:

- a) Identifying socio-educational practices, with an impact at the local level, which are successful in overcoming school failure and dropout;
- b) Characterizing the practices under study, according to parameters defined on the basis of relevant literature;
- c) Gathering perspectives from multiple actors (young people, teachers/other school staff, members of partner organizations, families and other community members);
- d) Identifying, gathering information about, and characterizing the successful academic pathways of young people participating in the previously identified socio-educational practices;
- e) Understanding in what ways, and at what levels, the socio-educational practices under study constitute learning communities and communities of practice;



Project EDUPLACES

METHODOLOGY:

- Predominantly qualitative, while also using instruments typically associated with quantitative research (questionnaires and statistical analysis);
- Constructivist and subjective, understanding from within, "discovering the context"
- Two school-based (SB) projects and two community-based (CB) projects in Braga, one SB project and one CB project in Olhão, two SB projects and one CB project in Porto, and one SB project and one CB project in Vila Real
- First phase: semi-structured interviews to institutional representatives (representing schools, in the case of SB initiatives, or local organizations, in the case of CB initiatives)



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RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS:

- a) Relevance of the territory is connected with the contribution of schools, associations, companies and other local organizations, not only as 'observers', but rather as active, critical and creative co-authors of the developing educational project;
- b) The territorial bond (in its several manifestations, according to each initiative's nature, goals and audiences) is an asset to the intervention projects;
- c) The stability of the intervention teams is crucial for the soundness of the implemented innovations;
- d) Initiatives perceived as innovative are strongly connected with the sphere of social relationships (communication), in a logic of preventive socialization



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- Two instruments: **Grid of Selection Criteria** (25 criteria) and **Descriptive Note** (13 items)

- Six criteria:

- Trust in the staff's ability to develop flexible and contextualized responses
- Change in socio-educational relationships
- Scientific, pedagogic and democratic quality

Innovative dimension

- Fostering relationships with parents/families and communities (creating their own spaces, times and procedures)
- Promoting the (deliberative, evaluative, educational) participation of parents/families and communities
- Supported by the joint and coordinated work of parents/families and communities

Local dimension

- Six items: Focus, Main objective, Main contribution, Main argument, Links to context and Institutional articulations



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Criterion/practices	NE_SB	NE_CB	N_SB_1	N_SB_2	N_CB_1	N_CB_2	NW_SB_1	NW_CB	NW_SB_2	S_SB	S_CB	TOTAL (out of 11)
Innovative dimension												
Fosters confidence in the technicians'/teachers' ability to develop innovations in a flexible and contextualized way (to the detriment of encouraging the replication of technical solutions)												10
Alters socio-educational relationships												10
Reveals scientific quality (defined contents are taught/learned), pedagogical quality (supported by a sound and/or innovative pedagogy) and democratic quality (promotes equality among students, enhances social justice, solidarity and freedom in education)												10
TOTAL (out of 3)	3	2	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	



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Criterion/practice	NE_SB	NE_CB	N_SB_1	N_SB_2	N_CB_1	N_CB_2	NW_SB_1	NW_CB	NW_S_B_2	S_SB	S_CB	TOTAL (out of 11)
Local dimension												
Fosters (through the creation of its own times, spaces and procedures) relationships with parents/families and communities												7
Promotes the (deliberative, evaluative, educational) participation of parents/families and communities												2
Is founded on the joint and coordinated work of parents/families and communities												1
TOTAL (out of 3)	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	1	2	2	1	



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- The promotion of confidence in technical teams, the transformation of socio-educational relations and the guarantee of scientific-pedagogical quality and democracy are particularly relevant aspects of these initiatives
- Innovation is invoked explicitly as an argument for success by one representative. The particularities of the pedagogic model are invoked as an argument to justify the selection (as successful and/or more representative) in four practices
- The opening and/or intensification of communication and cooperation channels emerges as the main contribution in four practices
- In addition to the impact that these practices seem to have on the development of actual institutional articulation efforts, some impact seems to be confirmed equally on socio-educational relationships (school-family communication pathways, importance attributed to formal schooling, socio-cultural inclusion of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds)



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- The creation of appropriate times, spaces and procedures for fostering relationships with parents/families and communities is an important component of these socio-educational practices. The low frequency of the remaining two criteria seems to suggest that there is still much to be done in promoting effective participation and collaborative work between these practices and the local context
- Articulated and collaborative work and the opening and/or intensification of communication and cooperation channels emerge as the main contribution to the success of the practice in eight of the cases
- However, networking/cooperative work is at the heart of the argumentation developed by representatives of only two practices. The impact that the practice has on the youth's progress in learning, and the importance attributed by the families, are the focus of the argument developed by the representatives of five of the selected practices
- Family involvement emerges as a link to the context in six of the selected practices (four SB and two CB)
- Data seems to corroborate the somewhat fragile involvement of families in practices aimed at promoting their youth's educational success, despite the importance attributed to this dimension by representatives.



General remarks

- From the representatives' POV, the practices that contribute most to overcoming school failure and dropout fall into one of these categories: Student Grouping (3 Practices), Study Support (4 Practices), Mediation (3 Practices) and Pedagogical Differentiation (1 Practice)
- These practices can be characterized as predominantly systemic strategies, with a minority being definable as programmatic; some are addressed to students, others to schools; they generally seek to mitigate or overcome conditions and factors that weaken the youth's academic and social commitment to the school
- What needs or problems do these practices address: children's needs or problems? Needs or problems of the institution/organization? Needs or problems of professionals? Family or community needs or problems?



Next steps

- Multi-actor perspectives on inclusive socio-educational practices
- Youth, professionals, members of partner organizations, teachers/other school staff, families and other community members
- Questionnaire
- Semi-structured interviews and focus groups
- Direct observation

The data presented in this paper is the outcome of the joint work of the EDUPLACES research team: Fátima Antunes (coord.), Almerindo Afonso, Armando Loureiro, Carlos Gomes, Emília Vilarinho, Esmeraldina Veloso, Isabel Costa, Isabel Menezes, Joana Lúcio, José Pedro Amorim, José Augusto Palhares, Manuel António Silva, Rosanna Barros, Tiago Neves and Virgínio Sá.